

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

MCT-01 CU-04 SY-05 /071 W

-----043162 251753Z /40

R 240520Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2573

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L KUALA LUMPUR 1585

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, AS, MY

SUBJ: SECURITY:ALLEGED THREAT AGAINST PRIME MINISTER

HUSSEIN ONN

REF : A) CANBERRA 1360 (DTG 230525Z FEB 78, B. KUALA LUMPUR

0477 (DTG 190747Z JAN 78) (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: LOCAL OBSERVERS REMAIN PUZZLED BY PRIME MINISTER'S SUDDEN RETURN FROM AUSTRALIA FOLLOWING RECENT REGIONAL COMMON-WEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT CONFERENCE IN SYDNEY. WE SURMISE THAT COMBINATION OF TANGIBLE SECURITY THREAT POSED BY UNIDENTIFIED EXTREMIST ELEMENTS ON THE LOOSE SOMEWHERE IN AUSTRALIA COMBINED WITH PRESSING BUSINESS AT HOME CAUSED PM TO DECIDE TO CURTAIL PRIVATE PORTION OF HIS VISIT. SPECULATION CURRENTLY CENTERS ON IDENTITY OF ORGANIZATION INVOLVED, WHICH HUSSEIN TOLD JOURNALISTS WAS KNOWN TO HIM BUT WHICH HE DECLINED TO IDENTIFY.
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ALTHOUGH REUTER CARRIED SYDNEY PRESS REPORT TO EFFECT THAT CONCERN FOR PM'S SAFETY WAS PROMPTED BY ANONYMOUS TELEPHONE TIP-OFF ALLEGING THAT A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS AFFILIATED WITH "THE FREEDOM LEAGUE" INTENDED TO KIDNAP HUSSEIN WHILE IN MELBOURNE, THIS IS THE FIRST WE HAVE HEARD OF ANY SUCH ENTITY. END SUMMARY.

2. LOCAL PRESS ON FEBRUARY 19 REPORTED PRIME MINISTER DATUK

HESSEIN ONN'S SUDDEN RETURN TO KUALA LUMPUR, CUTTING SHORT HIS VISIT TO AUSTRALIA BY TWO DAYS BECAUSE OF REPORTS OF AN ALLEGED PLOT TO KIDNAP HIM. HUSSEIN TOLD NEWSMEN COVERING HIS RETURN AMIDST TIGHT SECURITY AT SUBANG AIRPORT THAT HE WAS ABOUT TO LEAVE FOR MELBOURNE WHEN HE WAS INFORMED "THAT A GROUP OF PEOPLE FROM MALAYSIA HAD COME TO AUSTRALIA TO KIDNAP ME AND DO OTHER THINGS TO ME." ACCORDING TO THE "NEW STRAITS TIMES" (NST) ACCOUNT, HUSSEIN SAID THAT ALTHOUGH HE KNEW THE ORGANIZATION INVOLVED HE WOULDN'T NAME IT BUT COULD NONETHELESS STATE THAT "THEY ARE NOT HOLY PEOPLE", DEPUTY PM MAHATHIR INTERJECTING AT THIS POINT THAT INDEED "THEY ARE UNHOLY PEOPLE." HUSSEIN STRESSED HOWEVER THAT THE ALLEGED PLOT DID NOT INVOLVE MALAYSIAN STUDENTS.

3. HUSSEIN REPORTEDLY EXPLAINED THAT DECISION TO CURTAIL THE PRIVATE PORTION OF HIS AUSTRALIAN VISIT WAS MADE ENTIRELY ON HIS OWN AND DID NOT REFLECT LACK OF FAITH IN AUSTRALIAN SECURITY CAPABILITIES; RATHER HE FELT THAT HIS CONTINUED PRESENCE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD UNFAIRLY INCONVENIENCE THE AUSTRALIAN AUTHORITIES.

4. NST ALSO CARRIED REUTER ITEM CITING SYDNEY MORNING HERALD REPORT OF AN ANONYMOUS TELEPHONE TIP-OFF THE NEWSPAPER HAD RECEIVED FROM A MAN ALLEGING THAT "THIS MORNING (19 FEB) THERE ARE 16 PEOPLE GOING TO MELBOURNE TO KIDNAP HUSSEIN OF KUALA LUMPUR AT 1:30. P.. AND I AM SO WORRIED ABOUT IT. BETWEEN FOUR AND SEVEN PEOPLE CAME FROM KUALA LUMPUR ON TUESDAY. THEY ARE FROM

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THE FREEDOM LEAGUE." THE CALLER SUPPOSEDLY ADDED THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS WOULD JOIN OTHERS AND A TOTAL OF 16 WOULD /DO THE JOB" THE HERALD THEN NOTIFIED NEW SOUTH WALES POLICE SPECIAL BRANCH WHICH IN TURN PASSED IT ON TO THE VICTORIA SPECIAL BRANCH. REUTER REPORTED.

5. UPI IN A FEB 20 KUALA LUMPUR DATED LINE ARTICLE CARRIED IN FEB 21 KOTA KINABALU DAILY EXPRESS (AND NOT RPT NOT TO THE BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE CARRIED IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA PRESS) CITED SPECULATION BY UNIDENTIFIED POLITICAL SOURCES THAT CULPRITS IN ALLEGED PLOT MIGHT HAVE BEEN EITHER ISLAMIC PARTY "STALWARTS" FROM THE NORTHEASTERN BORDER STATE OF KELANTAN SEEKING TO FORCE CANCELLATION OF STATE ELECTIONS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 11 OR "VOLATILE" SUPPORTERS OF FORMER SELANGOR STATE CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARUN IDRIS WHOSE FINAL APPEALS ON CORRUPTION CONVICTIONS HAVE FAILED AND WHO NOW FACES AN IMMINENT 6-YEAR JAIL TERM.

6. AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION SOURCES HERE REPORT THAT THEY TOO ARE IN THE DARK ABOUT THE AFFAIR.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH A FEW OF OUR LOCAL CONTACTS HAVE UNCHARITABLY OPINED THAT THIS MAY BE BUT A PRE-ELECTION STUNT TO

SOMEHOW WIN SUPPORT FOR THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED PARTIES IN THE KELANTAN ELECTIONS, THIS DOES NOT FIT DATUK HUSSEIN'S STYLE. WE SURMISE THAT THE REPORT OF A TANGIBLE SECURITY THREAT POSED BY THE ALLEGED PRESENCE IN AUSTRALIA OF TERRORIST ELEMENTS, COMBINED WITH PRESSING BUSINESS AT HOME (PREPARATIONS FOR THE KELANTAN ELECTIONS, A RULERS' CONFERENCE, AND THE CURRENT VISIT BY THAI PM KRIANGSAK) LED DATUK HUSSEIN TO CURTAIL HIS AUSTRALIAN VISIT. AS FOR THE SO-CALLED "FREEDOM LEAGUE", IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT THIS MIGHT REFER TO ONE OF THE TWO MALAYAN COMMUNIST PARTY COMPONENTS THAT BEAR THE NAME "LIBERATION LEAGUE" (MALAYAN PEOPLE'S LIBERATION LEAGUE AND MALAYAN NATIONAL LIBERATION LEAGUE). HOWEVER, IF SO WE WONDER WHY THEY WERE NOT PUBLICLY IDENTIFIED SINCE THIS WOULD SEEM TO BE IN THE GOM'S INTEREST IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS ON-GOING ANTI-COMMUNIST CAMPAIGN. ALSO INTRIGUING ARE THE CONFIDENTIAL

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PM'S AND DPM'S REFERENCES TO THE "UNHOLINESS" OF THE CULPRITS, SUGGESTING THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE FANATICAL RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS. (SEE REF B FOR REPORT OF GOM CONCERNS RE RADICAL ISLAMIC GROUPS.) MILLER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SECURITY, PRIME MINISTER, THREATS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978KUALA01585
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780088-0410
Format: TEL
From: KUALA LUMPUR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780217/aaaaaoji.tel
Line Count: 140
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 0bd138d0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 CANBERRA 1360
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3489947
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SECURITY:ALLEGED THREAT AGAINST PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN
TAGS: PINS, AS, MY, (HUSSEIN BIN ONN)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/0bd138d0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014